

### Ellis Laments Passage of Overly-Restrictive Voter ID Law

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Efforts to amend bill to protect Texas voters fail

(Austin, Texas)//Senator Rodney Ellis (D-Houston) today lamented passage of Senate Bill 14, so-called Voter ID legislation that will make it significantly more difficult for hundreds of thousands of legally-registered Texans to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

"We all agree that ensuring the integrity of the vote is extremely important," said Senator Ellis.

"Because that right is extremely important, we need to be careful moving forward so that we don't create unnecessary barriers to a scared, constitutional right.

"No one here is saying that having an ID unto itself at the polls is a bad thing," Ellis continued. "What we're saying is you must make sure that these proposed 'free' IDs are readily accessible. Unfortunately, everything we heard on the floor yesterday tells us that they won't be, and all efforts to ensure they would were voted down here today."

The fact is that SB 14 impacts potential over one million Texans who could well be eligible to vote but will not be able to while doing nothing to increase access to now-mandated IDs. For instance:

- **According to the DPS Driver Responsibility Program**, 1.2 million Texas drivers who have lost their licenses over surcharges cannot buy insurance until their fees are paid, but large numbers (if not virtually all) of them continue to drive. What's worse, under SB 14, they wouldn't have a form of ID required to vote.
- **You can lose your license for very minor offenses.** Lest we think that only those "bad people" or "felons" have their licenses suspended or revoked, unpaid surcharges, having no insurance, driving while license is invalid, passing a school bus, truancy or even simply failing to appear or pay a your fine for a traffic offense can lead to you having your license suspended. That is potentially hundreds of thousands of Texans, not a relative few.
- While much was said yesterday about the new amnesty program, **less than half of the 1.2 million are being offered amnesty.**
- The amnesty program affects anyone who was assessed a surcharge from the start of the program in September 2004 through the end of 2008. **So no one after 2008 can benefit.**
- Most importantly, we may well be **creating a new poll tax** under this bill. **If you have a fine that has led to your license suspension, you have to pay DPS for the right to vote...**not just your fine, but your surcharges and more. That may well violate the Voting Rights Act.
- **None of the offices in Harris County are open on the weekend.** Save for an occasional 6 pm closing time, all of them are open from 8 am to 5 pm — when people work.



- According to testimony and studies, long lines and frustrating waits at DPS, and **three or four hour waits aren't out of the norm.**
- SB 14 does not take into account proposed budget cuts, which will **further increase the strain on the already over-tasked DPS employees.**
- According to DPS, **approximately 77 counties in Texas currently have no DPS center** for voters, forcing Texans into long drives and more time in order to get a mandatory ID. This is a double burden for those with no vehicles or access to public transportation.
- **There are no DPS offices located in most inner-city neighborhoods in Texas.** For instance, in Houston, there are no DPS offices located inside of the I-610 loop.

"Texas has a long and sad history of making it difficult for people to vote," said Senator Ellis. "Men and women in this chamber repeatedly voted to keep people out of the voting booth. Decades later, history judges those men and women in a harsh light.

"Thanks to that history, our state remains under federal oversight," said Ellis. "If we are going to place more red tape between the voting booth and our constituents, I firmly believe it is our duty that we ensure it's a well thought out plan and protects the rights of all legal voters. We have not done that today. Instead, the Texas Senate has made it far more difficult for potentially hundreds of thousands of legal, registered voters to exercise their constitutional right. That is wrong... and it will be remembered."